

Importance of Team Work

-by Naseer Ahmed

For over three years I taught 'Management Process' – a business course comprising of principles and practices in the MBA programme of a private university. I intentionally included 'Total Quality Management' – in my course. The reading materials, I used were mainly from international magazines. But recently I have found the latest edition of an important text book and was very happy that TQM has been very nicely elaborated with lots of unique application examples from world famous excellent companies.

Going through the new chapter addition of that text I got new insight regarding unlocking the power of team work for TQM implementation in order to have better performance in organisations. Now, in this column, I want to project this new realisation along with relevant examples from some top companies.

Lee Iacocca, the legendary business leader of the USA once said, " Quality and productivity are two sides of the same coin. Everything you do for quality improves your productivity." And we all know that improved productivity and efficiency leads to better profitability and success. But quality will not be come automatically – people power of our organisations must be harnessed to achieve this. And this improved quality will not be confined to product quality but quality will be emphasised in every aspect of the organisation – environment, outlook, attitude, service, value, etc.

Following the definition of TQM which highlights the importance of creating an organisational culture committed to the continuous improvement of skill works , team work, processes, product and service quality and customer satisfaction – we become convinced of the role of willing and enterusiastic participation of people and people only. TQM is indeed a continuous, customer – centred and employee or people driven improvement process.

For the success of TQM employees should be empowered at all levels in order to tap their full creativity, motivation and commitment, it is said that empowerment actually occurs when employees are properly trained, provided with all relevant information and best possible tools and techniques, fully involved in key decisions and fairly rewarded for results. TQM indeed advocates for increased team work of people from different areas of expertise.

Chrysler motor is organised into four steamlined platform teams, large car, small car, minivan and jeep truck. Each team includes product and manufacturing engineers, planners and buyers, marketers, designers, financial analysts and outside suppliers and each is responsible for getting their vehicles to market. Gone are those days when an engineer finishes his price of car and tosses the plan over the fence to the next guy up the line. Platform teams and about every body working together. The result is better quality, lower cost and a reduction in the time to get a product to market. Thus Chrysler fosters TQM through a unique arrangement of team work.

There are other examples also. A night-shift team at a general mills cereal plant in the USA sets its own schedules and runs and maintains the equipment. And the team does it so well that the shift runs without close supervision.

A team of Federal Express Employees uncovered a billing problem that was costing the company \$2.1 million every year. But members did not take the

usual route and tell management, 'Here is a problem, now you solve it'. Instead they worked as a team and solved the problem themselves.

All these are bright examples of teamworks where relentless improvement is the process through which remarkable results are achieved. The lesson is that organisations who want to be world-class, who want to be competitive and survive in the long run business scenario must tap the power of team work.

Some days back I read an interview of Warren Avis, founder of world's most successful rent a car company. He says, 'My whole approach is getting people to work together, getting their egos and self-interest out of the way to work for betterment of the project. The results are always incredible'. He is always interested to run his business with teams so that a few power hungry managers can not wreck the whole business.

But how a CEO or an entrepreneur will implement the TQM related team approach? Of course that is a great challenge, People who think they know everything can't work with other people because they even do not know how to start. They do not know how to listen, how to take feed-back. But it is to be remembered that if people are given opportunity through team work uncommon results are achieved. In reality all uncommon deeds in the world are done by common people – only proper leadership is required.